

## Nest description and plumage variation of the Sepia-brown Wren *Cinnycerthia peruana*

by Michael Gochfeld

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Two little known wrens, the Sepia-brown Wren *Cinnycerthia peruana* and the Rufous Wren *C. unirufa* occur in sub-tropical and temperate Andean forests. On 23 September 1972, at the Carpish Pass, Department of Huanuco, Peru, Stuart Keith, Dan and Erica Tallman, and I, found a nest of *C. peruana* in very wet cloud forest at about 2700 m a.s.l. It was about 2.5 m above the ground, suspended from and partly penetrated by a curving bamboo stem.

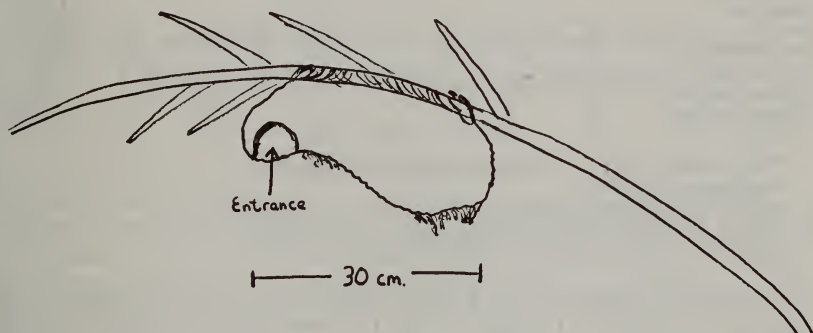


Fig. 1. Diagrammatic drawing of nest of *Cinnycerthia peruana*.

The nest mass was firmly tethered to the support by fine rootlets. The overall size was 20 x 30 cm by 15 cm high. The main pouch containing the nest cavity was about 10 x 15 x 15 cm, consisting mainly of rootlets into which small strands of green moss were woven. The upper portion of this pouch was composed mainly of dried bamboo leaflets. The down-turned tunnel had a nearly circular entrance 3 cm in diameter, which was completely encircled by green moss.

The nest contained a 1 day old naked chick and a pipping egg. The egg's ground colour was pale creamy white and it was sparsely speckled with reddish brown, particularly toward the larger end. It measured 21.5 x 11.5 mm. Taczanowski (1887) describes a single egg found 26 August 1871 as white with few small reddish spots and measuring 21.3 x 11.8 mm. He does not mention the nest or young nor other habits. Schonwetter (1971) gives measurements of 18.0 x 13.0 (1.55 g) for egg(s) attributed to *C. unirufa*.

### White head feathering

We captured and photographed an incubating bird, and this had white feathers encircling the eye and on the forecrown. Of the 7 Sepia-brown Wrens we saw in a group nearby, 3 had conspicuous white feathers on the head, including one with a white forecrown, chin and face. Although known to field ornithologists (e.g., J. P. O'Neill, pers. comm.) such individual variation with white facial feathering is not treated in the literature. I

therefore examined specimens to ascertain the geographic distribution and possible age and sex factors influencing such variation. Of 17 specimens in the American Museum of Natural History (A.M.N.H.), 3 of 9 ♂♂ and none of 8 ♀♀ had white feathers on the head. This is not a significant difference (Fisher Exact Test,  $p > .10$ ). One was a male from the Carpish Tunnel area, with white face and forehead.

TABLE I

Occurrence of white facial feathering in the Sepia-brown Wren *Cinnycerthia peruana*.<sup>1</sup>

Location <sup>2</sup>	White feathers present						Museum
	Males		Females		Totals		
	No	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	
Carpish Pass	1	3	3	3	4	6	LSU
Carpish Pass	1	1	1	0	2	1	AMNH
Yuraccyacu	2	2	0	1	2	3	LSU
Lourde	5	0	3	0	8	0	LSU
Abra Patricia	6	0	2	0	8	0	LSU
Huaylas Pampa	1	2	4	3	5	5	LSU
Other localities	5	1	2	0	7	1	LSU
Other localities	5	2	7	0	12	2	AMNH
TOTAL	26	11	22	7	48	18	

<sup>1</sup>Only specimens of *C. p. peruana* are included in this table.

<sup>2</sup>See text for locations.

LSU = Louisiana State University, Baton Rouge, Louisiana.

AMNH = American Museum of Natural History, New York.

Through the courtesy of Dr. John P. O'Neill, I examined specimens in the Museum of Zoology, Louisiana State University (L.S.U.), Baton Rouge, Louisiana (Table 1). Ten specimens from the Carpish included 3 ♀♀ with white feathers (a single feather in one case and a completely white face in another). Five specimens taken at 2600 m a.s.l. near Yuraccyacu, Department of Ayacucho (13° 45' S, 73° 47' W) included a ♀ and 2 ♂♂ with some white feathers. Ten specimens from Huaylas Pampa (2950 m a.s.l.), Department of Loreto, included 3 ♀♀ and 2 ♂♂ with slight to extensive white feathering. An apparent family group (5 ♂♂ and 3 ♀♀) from San Jose de Lourde (2200 m a.s.l.), Department of Cajamarca, and 8 specimens from Abra Patricia (2050 m a.s.l.), Department of San Martin, had no white feathers.

Of the total of 65 L.S.U. and A.M.N.H. specimens of *C. p. peruana*, birds with some white feathers comprised 10 of 36 ♂♂ and 7 of 29 ♀♀, which shows no significant intersex difference (Chi Square Test,  $p > .20$ ). There is as yet no evidence on whether white feathering might be age-related, though both immature and adult specimens in the collections show white feathers, and the white-faced bird we captured was presumably an incubating adult (though it could have been a sub-adult helper).

Meyer de Schauensee (1970) mentions that one race of *peruana*, the Bolivian bird *C. p. fulva*, has a broad buffy-white eyebrow, while another, *C. p. olivascens*, from Colombia and Ecuador, often has a buffy white patch on the forecrown. I interpret the former as a subspecific character and the latter has an intra-racial variation. The intra-population variation which we found at the Carpish occurs at several localities in Peru. Another wren, *Campylorhynchus turdinus*, has some races with white heads (*albobrunneus*, *harterti*) in Colombia and Panama, thus showing extreme geographic (=racial) variation.

However, the irregular, intra-population variation in white facial feathering, which occurs in the Sepia-brown Wren, is a unique phenomenon in the Troglodytidae, and clearly deserves attention.

References:

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 Taczanowski, L. 1884. *Ornithologie du Perou*. Rennes, Vol. 2.  
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## On the possible existence of the New Caledonian Wood Rail *Tricholimnas lafresnayanus*

by Tony Stokes

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The New Caledonian Wood Rail *Tricholimnas lafresnayanus* was described in 1860 and is now known only from 13 museum specimens (Fullagar, Disney & de Naurois in prep.). The most recent of these date from 1890 and all seem to have been secured by local villagers in the south of the island. The only record of its habits are observations made of captive birds in the early 1880's (Layard & Layard 1882).

It seems however that the species may still exist in very small numbers since unauthenticated accounts of captures by local villagers have continued to trickle to the ears of naturalists over the past 80 years (e.g. Warner 1947, de Naurois pers. comm.).

According to most authors, the rail is a close relative and congener of the Lord Howe Island Woodhen *T. sylvestris*, which is now reduced to a seemingly stable wild population of some 20 individuals atop a rugged peak on Lord Howe Island. Though uncertain, Disney (1974a) surmises that the feral populations of goats *Capra hirtus*, pigs *Sus scrofa*, rats *Rattus rattus* and cats *Felis domesticus* have contributed to the disappearance of *T. sylvestris* from the lowlands. The pig is the only one which does not at present share the surviving woodhen's habitat since it has apparently been unable to scale the peak.

In November 1975, I spent 2 weeks observing the Lord Howe Island Woodhen atop Mount Gower and discussing its biology with H. J. de S. Disney and Dr Peter Fullagar. I subsequently visited New Caledonia from 24 November–24 December 1976 to investigate recent reports of the existence of *lafresnayanus* and to conduct a search on the premise that the species' ecology would resemble that of *sylvestris*.

Though Olson (1973) believes that *sylvestris* and *lafresnayanus* should be separated generically, Ripley (1977) submerges them into *Rallus* with the comment that they are alike in many respects and may be considered part of a superspecies. Greenway (1967) also thought them very similar and Fullagar, Disney & de Naurois (in prep.) have retained both in *Tricholimnas*. Whatever